

Committee on Government Reform



MEDIA ADVISORY

**For Immediate Release
March 25, 2003**

**Contact: David Marin/Scott Kopple
(202) 225-5074**

“Point, Click, Self-Medicate: A Review of Consumer Safeguards on Internet Pharmacy Sites”

What: Government Reform Committee Hearing on Internet Pharmacy Sites

When: Thursday, March 27, 2003, immediately following 10 a.m. business meeting

Where: Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building

Background:

The sale of consumer products over the Internet has grown exponentially over the past 10 years. Clearly, access to prescription drugs via online pharmacies can provide potential benefits to consumers -- including convenience and reduced costs.

But while many online pharmacies operate in the same manner as traditional brick-and-mortar drug stores, and comply with the standards of state licensing authorities, not all pharmacies practicing over the Internet are legitimate sites. The Internet creates an easy environment for illegitimate sites to bypass traditional regulations and established safeguards for the sale of prescription drugs.

It is now easy to obtain virtually any medication online without ever seeing or speaking with a physician. This absence of a doctor-patient relationship does not meet the appropriate standard of care dictated by state medical boards.

The most popular drugs sold online are so-called “lifestyle drugs” including Viagra for erectile dysfunction and Propecia for hair loss. Oftentimes, consumers may be too embarrassed to visit their physician and ask for a prescription. As a result, to avoid a potentially uncomfortable situation, some consumers seek out the drug offered over the Internet. A brief online interaction, even if a questionnaire is used, may miss essential information on whether a given drug is safe for a particular patient. The risks of self-medicating can include potential adverse reactions from inappropriately prescribed

medications, dangerous drug interactions, and use of counterfeit or tainted products. Several of these illegitimate sites fail to provide information about contraindications, potential adverse effects, and efficacy.

Regulating these Internet pharmacies can be a challenge for Federal and state enforcement capabilities. Not all Internet pharmacies comply with state licensing requirements and standards. Authorities have trouble tracking down these illegitimate sites because many do not disclose identifying information, change their names and appearances often, and sometimes disappear without a trace. Accountability becomes problematic when the violators cannot be identified and located.

WITNESSES

We will hear testimony from the following witnesses to discuss the regulatory challenges created by the domestic sale of prescription drugs over the Internet.

Panel One

William Hubbard, Senior Associate Commissioner for Policy Planning and Legislation,
Food and Drug Administration

J. Howard Beales, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection, Federal Trade
Commission

Panel Two

James Thompson, M.D., Executive Vice President, Chief Executive Officer, Federation
of State Medical Boards

Carmen Catizone, M.S., R. Ph., D. Ph., Executive Director, National Association of
Boards of Pharmacy

National Association of Attorneys General, TBD

###